The Call of the Kererū: *The Question of Customary Use*

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The distinctive "swoop, swoop" of a *kererū* (New Zealand native wood pigeon) taking leave of its perch on a miro branch is a familiar sound for many New Zealanders. But now, like the bell of the boxing ring, it signifies a great battle in progress. The debate over the customary use of indigenous wildlife in New Zealand, like Māori ownership of protected areas, has brought the issue of biculturalism once again into the conservation spotlight (King 1994; Smith 1994; Atkinson 1993; Moller 1995; Barrington 1995; New Zealand Ecological Society 1995). The environmental dimension of the biculturalism debate was recently stirred by the New Zealand Conservation Authority when in May 1994 it published a discussion paper that raised the possibility of allowing *iwi* (Māori tribes) to legally resume sustainable harvests of wildlife currently protected under the Wildlife Act (New Zealand Conservation Authority 1994). The discussion paper caused an uproar among conservation managers, scientists, and environmentalists throughout the country and was strongly rejected by a number of interest groups. This fiasco provides an interesting example of the state of cross-cultural discourse in New Zealand in an era of lip service to cross-cultural equality.

Customary Use of Native Wildlife

Indigenous plants and animals sustained the Māori people for centuries, and now as ever before there is a desire among Māori to continue their customary relationship with the landscape, a relationship that involved harvesting certain species for various uses. What was once commonplace for Māori is now largely a thing of the past, but the desire to retain past

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aspects of the culture and employ them in the practices of the present is part of what it means to be Māori. However, the harvesting of *kererū* (and other species of indigenous wildlife) is seen by many (mostly European) conservationists as a major problem for the survival of indigenous wildlife species, of which an increasing number are rare or endangered.

For most Pākehā (European) conservationists, native animals are too precious to harvest, and as a consequence almost all native animal species (mostly birds) are legally protected, despite the fact that a variety of these species formed part of the diet of the Māori for centuries. Only since European arrival have species like the *kererū* become endangered, mostly through loss of habitat and the introduction of predators. While it is true that there were numerous extinctions of native birds prior to European arrival (eg, eleven species of moa), many species that were prominent food resources managed to survive and flourish with the Māori for centuries (Wright, Nugent, and Parata 1995). Present-day harvests of some of these birds, particularly the *kererū,* have received much condemnation from some segments of the environmental community, notably the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society (see Atkinson 1993; Smith 1994; Barrington 1995). The attitudes of some of the more prominent opinion leaders of the New Zealand environmental community are demonstrative of a lack of understanding of social issues relating to Māori cultural integrity and culturally sensitive approaches to environmental problem solving.

Although it is true that ongoing *kererū* harvests by Māori in many areas are likely to be unsustainable at present, this does not mean that they were never sustainable or never could be. However, resolving the current problem of a *kererū* overkill is unlikely to happen if Pākehā environmentalists and environmental managers continue to depict Māori as natural enemies of conservation in New Zealand. On the contrary, the success of *kererū* conservation and sustainability in general is more likely to occur when cross-cultural relations reach a degree of harmony. Only when Māori are given the room to engage in conservation on their own terms are they likely to become actively involved in conservation. Their involvement may take the form of exercising restraint once the right to cultural harvesting has been acknowledged (King 1994).

So long as Māori are denied access to customary practices by Pākehā, the "illegal" harvests are likely to continue. It is time for Pākehā in New Zealand to recognize the injustices suffered by the Māori and give Māori the room and resources to be themselves. The benefits for conservation

are potentially very high, particularly if Māori customary systems of resource use become commonplace, where the land and the people are nurtured in a living community. If environmentalists were to assist Māori efforts toward cultural revival, the outcome, as a coexistence of cultural and ecological diversity, would be a richer life for everyone concerned.

Conservation and Preservation

Arguments over conservation policy are often framed as a dichotomy between preservationist and conservationist, the former being harvest prohibitionists, the latter seeing harvesting as an option while protecting the population in general. The problem with this dichotomy is that often both groups fail to fully appreciate that it is the entire human relationship with all "resources" that determines relationships with ecological surroundings, including the industrial consumption of natural riches and the production of industrial wastes.

The New Zealand environmental community (official and nongovernment) is dominated by efforts to prevent the destruction of habitats and the loss of rare and endangered species. Such protection of remaining biodiversity is urgently needed and is a major task in itself. Because of this, those involved in conservation efforts in New Zealand tend to focus their attention on preventing any further habitat destruction and species depletion by humans of any race or culture. This has led to a focus on the protection of a selection of worthy victims of industrial capitalism that include indigenous plants and animals and the ecosystems that support them. Unworthy victims include underprivileged people at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder (of whom a large proportion are Māori) as well as nonindigenous biota. Conservation efforts frequently fail to adequately target sources of an unsustainable modern culture that happily exploits humans and habitats, indigenous and introduced.

Anyone who has contemplated the socioeconomic and cultural problems behind environmental degradation in modern New Zealand may recognize that the ecological context of Māori culture provides a significant alternative to the industrial status quo. Efforts by Māori to reassert their cultural links with the land may be seen as part of a process of resistance to the forms of resource abuse that characterize modernity. Some Pākehā objectors may claim that Māori are also involved in industrial resource exploitation. But not all Māori can be categorized as brown-skinned

capitalists. A significant proportion of Māori people in New Zealand are attempting to gain access to resources that will allow them to survive in a modern world where the rules have been defined by European industrialism. Some are happy to adopt an industrial culture as part of a process of revival and survival. But not all Māori are doing this, and many are attempting simply to be Māori by engaging in customary practices as part of their cultural revival.

Māori cannot be placed in a single category and never could be. They were never one people, but were and are made up of a large number of different tribes. Today, this diversity is increased by the cultural differences within the same tribe, where some have willingly abandoned or unwillingly lost their traditional culture in exchange for modernity, while others have managed to retain much of the meaning of Māoridom in spite of the disadvantages suffered by them in a contemporary market-driven political economy. Cultural diversity within Māoridom is a fact of modern life in New Zealand. However, those Māori who are interested in and committed to the revival and survival of their culture must be respected by Māori and Pākehā alike, because such a countercultural movement is an important departure from the anti-ecological industrial culture that has eclipsed ecologically nonviolent ways of life in New Zealand in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such people are attempting to conserve a means of living with a landscape that does not rest on the instrumental value of natural economic resources. Similar projects are being undertaken by elements within and alongside the Pākehā environmental community, including organic agriculture, holistic approaches to health, sustainable and appropriate technologies, feminism and ecofeminism, community and sustainable development, and the peace movement.

Addressing the causes of unsustainability is an important task, and those involved in it recognize that the cultural context of resource use is all important. Those conservationists and preservationists who fail to recognize the ecological character of their own culture may be unwittingly contributing to the problem. As a result, the debate between conservationists and preservationists continues to rage in ever-increasing irrelevance, partly because of the "conservationist" argument (contra preservationist) that the use of certain resources need only be sustained at certain levels for such harvests to be environmentally legitimate. Although this may be naively true, such arguments tend to be put forward by those who have no genuine interest in environmental protection as such and are

looking for political excuses to justify their existing (often commercial) harvest. Examples are common in the recreational hunting of introduced wild animals such as deer, and in the fishing industry.

"Preservationist" reactions to such arguments are justifiably intense. But the trouble is that when a genuine sustainable-harvest advocate asserts an interest in the conservation of the species targeted for harvesting (eg, Māori calls for legitimation of customary harvests of *kererū*) the preservationist dogma, developed in battles against industrial opponents, is unleashed as if *all Māori* are either commercially motivated, entirely insincere, or incapable of achieving such sustainability. Because Māori calls for legitimating customary harvests tend to be framed as cultural projects, any assertion that Māori are incapable of sustainability is an assertion that Māori culture is necessarily and entirely ecologically dysfunctional. Such generalizations can only be made by people who have little or no understanding of Māori culture. This is the condition of some of the more prominent opinion leaders of the Pākehā environmental community. Furthermore, appeals by Māori or Pākehā to recognize the ecologically benign dimensions of Māori culture cannot be judged a priori as acts of romanticism. Such anachronistic judgments of ethnographic analysis by opponents of Māori and their Pākehā supporters reflect ignorance of the contemporary significance of countercultural resistance, whether or not such resistance has a written or oral history. Cultural differences exist today, and will influence relationships in the future.

Cultural Differences

If there are no ecological differences between Māori and European cultural groups, then the customary-use debate falls into a rather shallow argument over who can or cannot harvest and consume indigenous wildlife within the context of a late-twentieth-century Pākehā-dominated New Zealand. But if there are major ecological differences between these cultural groups (as of course there are), then the customary-use debate invites a much deeper analysis of cultural ecology and necessitates a process of cultural self-reflection for all participants.

The customary-use issue is not merely about who can kill a *kererū*. It concerns the relationship of all people with the land. Although the technologies of the late-twentieth century are far different from those used in past centuries, the issue is not one of technology. It is one of culture. It is

not about use, but customary use, and there is a crucial difference. The word *customary* signifies a particular *mode* of use, and it is the mode of a lifestyle that engenders a cultural character that may or may not be ecologically benign. The mode of late-twentieth-century industrial capitalism expresses an ecological character radically different from that of Māori culture. The systems of economy, of consumption and exchange, were quite different prior to European colonization and were reflected in the relationship of Māori with the landscape. What are now called "natural resources" with nothing other than utility value, were, and still are for a large number of Māori people, not merely utilities but aspects of the landscape that interacted with people in a relationship of interpenetrating identity (see Marsden 1992; Ritchie 1992; Irwin 1984). A lamb is not blessed with such esteem in the eyes of a sheep farmer, nor is a totara tree to a logging company. The mode of modern relationships is vastly different. The relationships of humans with their ecological surroundings determine their capacity for mutual coexistence. And mutual coexistence is a condition that is enduring and hence sustainable.

The debate surrounding customary use is also confused when race and culture are misunderstood. Furthermore, if seen as a cultural issue, then access to customary harvests is not guaranteed by skin color but by the culture one is practicing. In this way not all people who are Māori by race are likely to be able to participate in any customary harvest, because to be involved in a Māori customary harvest one must be a member of a Māori cultural community. Furthermore, the harvesting of cultural treasures such as the *kererū* may end up being prohibited entirely in most areas by Māori communities who, in communication with conservation scientists, recognize the need to allow *kererū* populations to increase substantially above current levels before any sustainable harvest is possible. The problem for many Māori people in New Zealand today is that they have little opportunity to be members of such communities and are consequently alienated from their own culture. This is the very problem that Māori people are attempting to remedy with the contemporary cultural revival occurring in New Zealand, where the legitimation of access to customary harvests of traditional food sources is part of the project.

The deep-rooted distrust of Māori culture by some Pākehā stems partly from a misunderstanding of what is meant by *Māori*. For many people the word *Māori* signifies a race, and these are the ones who jeer at those with mixed ancestry who speak publicly on Māori issues. Such people are

racists. Far fewer people understand *Māori* as referring to a culture, which includes a racial dimension, but more importantly involves a language and a worldview. Just as there can be brown-skinned monetarists, there can also be white-skinned indigenes. It depends what culture one is practicing and the relationship of that culture with the land. The color of one's skin has very little to do with it.

Becoming Indigenous

The fact that humans in general have, in the past, shared in the ecological metamorphosis of the New Zealand landscape tells very little about how to judge calls for customary use today. Finding someone to blame for past events is not particularly useful because blaming others (such as someone else's or one's own ancestors) is mostly used as a scapegoat for one's own present shortcomings. The exact details of history and prehistory can never be known, but with prudence people can begin to understand the present. Sustainability is not about the past but concerns present human actions and the ecological consequences of what humans are becoming—becoming a place, becoming an integral member of a social and ecological community, becoming indigenous, coexisting.

The Polynesian people who ventured south to Aotearoa found not only a place to live, but a place to become. They did not set out to become indigenous, as if this were some kind of quest. Indigenousness happens. It is not something that can be planned, because planning necessitates control, and control is made possible through coercion in some form. To control one's environment is not to belong to it, but indigenousness is about belonging. If the Māori were or are indigenous to what is now called New Zealand it is through belonging, which is something that grows. The Polynesian people who came to be called Māori in the nineteenth century (Walker 1990) were not indigenous to these landscapes when they arrived, but in time they learned from their mistakes and adjusted to the land and its rhythms (see Davidson 1984). The people became the land and vice versa. Forests were burned, extinctions happened. But this is not the end of the story.

If the Māori were (and are) as ecologically evil as they are claimed to be by some (eg, Smith 1994), then the fact that there were forests and birds in abundance to greet the Europeans, after a thousand years of habitation, must truly have been a miracle. But what happened as soon as

modernity dropped anchor? Those very forests and birds are now scarce indeed, after a mere hundred and fifty years of enlightened European resource management. Pākehā conservationists do not necessarily defend this; indeed, the dismal history of European resource abuse is often what motivates people in the conservation movement. However, such conservationists need to recognize that the culture they themselves are practicing may be part of the equation of unsustainability, in terms of the economic system they subscribe to and its foundations in the framing of nature as a set of resources for economic production, with the exception of protected areas here and there. Isolating some aspects of nature (eg, indigenous bird species, or a forest) as worthy of conservation while leaving the rest to fend for themselves arises from a failure to understand sustainability as a cultural event.

The authoritative mainstay of western culture has for centuries denounced the spirit of the earth beneath its feet. The land and everything on it or beneath it are reduced to utilities—resources, objects, and tools of a culture that sees nature as an "other" to control. *Papatūānuku* (the Māori Earth Mother) on the other hand, is not merely an object to be walked on, carved up, managed, bought, and sold. The relationship between Māori and the earth is commensurate with a recognition of the interdependencies of life in the landscape that runs through the structure of Māori language itself and emerges as meanings that do not necessarily exist in the context of modern English (see for example Johnston and Robertson 1993). The ecological ethic thereby engendered is a far deeper shade of green than most Pākehā environmentalists have ever dreamed of. The trouble is, of course, that Māori people (and many Pākehā for that matter) have been coerced into participating in a modern cultural world in which such notions of belonging are at best regarded as expressions of quaint romanticism (best left to poets and artists), or at worst deemed illegitimate, primitive, and philistine.

The Context of Debate

The context of the debate over customary use is where the major problem lies, because whoever sets the limits of discussion sets the boundaries of the debate and its potential outcomes. But even within the sphere of debate on customary use, the question is, Who can claim to stand as the ultimate authority? This is a political issue and not the exclusive property

of species recovery scientists. The debate is not merely about how to define the minimum harvestable population of an indigenous bird species. It is about the ecopolitics of cross-cultural negotiation and the social and cultural world that such negotiation makes possible. It is about the possibility of partnership. Partnership as the coexistence of differences necessitates the reconciliation of different cultures and their knowledge systems. Here, both Māori and Pākehā can begin to learn from each other, rather than one being subordinated by the other as is the case today. For this to be possible environmental discourse must become more dialogical.

Negotiation as dialogue happens when those engaged in discourse are free to express themselves and be understood as part of a political process aimed at a just outcome. The different goals of different interest groups are not irreconcilable if dialogue is able to inform each party of the others' respective concerns. In this way the conservation of indigenous wildlife can be attained concurrently with the goal of cultural self-determination by Māori, but only if the different parties are prepared to attempt to understand each other. Māori people have had little choice but to understand the Pākehā world in order to survive (Walker 1990) and have been doing so for decades. It is about time Pākehā began to understand the Māori world in order to achieve coexistence and sustainability. Today, the onus is on Pākehā to put more effort into understanding the perspective of Māori people as part of the process of negotiating issues such as customary use.

This is a question of political style, which includes the institutionalized communicative structures that mediate cross-cultural negotiation. Institutional structures or political styles that prevent or obstruct any one party from legitimately contributing to a debate (concerning customary use of indigenous wildlife or any other topic) will preclude an outcome capable of fostering enduring solutions. Māori people have had to modify their contribution to political discourse in New Zealand in order to conform to Pākehā political structures and expectations. This situation is beginning to change with the numerous *hui* (traditional Māori meetings) being undertaken on a number of different issues of governmental concern, the customary-use debate included. This is a positive step and needs to be supported by Pākehā environmentalists, because the political style that characterizes the *hui* is likely to provide Pākehā groups with a better opportunity to convey their views alongside the views of Māori. The dialogue that results will serve to educate different interest groups and will

allow understanding to unfold, rather than the confrontations that tend to characterize present-day politics. Precedents exist in Pākehā culture for similar political styles, which focus on consensus democracy and can be found in such places as feminism (see Merchant 1980; King 1981; Estes 1989), critical social science (Habermas 1985; Giddens 1990), soft and critical systems methodologies (Checkland 1981; Flood and Ulrich 1990), and postmodern politics (Mouffe 1988), to name a few.

In the absence of any genuine attempt to remove structures of political domination from the process of environmental decision making, environmental programs will invariably fail to resolve the social and cultural issues that consistently haunt "good management." Furthermore, the resolution of social and cultural "obstructions" to "good management" provides an opportunity to move environmental management into the field of ecological sustainability, because social interactions are part of the ecological dynamic in any landscape, and the consequences of social and cultural activities are manifest as environmental impacts. Resolving resource-use conflicts is one example of a social and cultural activity; the working of an economic system is another.

When environmental management programs lack a social justice dimension, conservation efforts will frequently amount to rather shallow forms of environmental charity, sometimes funded by corporate sponsors (as is inherently common with charity). Focusing environmental concerns on protecting plants and animals, while doing nothing to change the cultural basis of relationships of human groups with each other and the landscape, may be characterized as fiddling while Rome burns. In the process, environmentalists will busy themselves by patching up the symptoms of social and ecological injustices while leaving the social and cultural causes unconstrained. In turn, environmental problems will be perpetuated because their causes have been insulated from critical scrutiny. By failing to address the social injustices that lie beneath many environmental problems, a significant proportion of the environmental movement is in danger of being charged with protecting not nature but a violent cultural order, which in New Zealand had its genesis in the domination of the Māori people and their land.

Different Shades of Green

The customary-use issue offers an exciting opportunity to test the political integrity of all parties concerned. New Zealand conservationists are a

diverse group and consist of a broad spectrum of interests, ranging from pragmatic protected-species and protected-area advocates, who have little understanding (and hence concern) for the environmental consequences of their own lifestyle or culture, through to a deeper shade of "greenie," who are aware of the ecological implications of certain cultural norms and recognize that many environmental problems are merely symptoms of a much greater cultural equation of social and ecological disharmony.

Pragmatists will do all they can within the existing sociopolitical and cultural status quo, achieve a degree of campaign and media success, and look good in the process. I call this Machiavellian environmentalism. To be successful in this camp one must adopt and employ the language games of the dominant institutions that protect and conserve the locus of power in this modern society. Such forms of conservation are usually of a technical orientation and focus on the unquestioning use of existing planning and policy structures for environmental gains. The danger of such approaches is that they serve to legitimate the character of the dominant institutions of this society and reinforce the locus of power. Environmental management gains are made, while more important concerns for social and ecological justice are covered over.

In addition, the limits of the "legitimate" environmental debate are framed by the institutions (that is, the government, the media, and the business interests they represent) in such a way that any threat to their power base is marginalized. Successful Machiavellian environmental technocrats also put their weight behind institutional conservatism because their credibility depends on it. They will happily rock the institutional boat, but they don't want to sink it. The same can said for those Māori activists who, like liberal feminists, make no attempt to change the existing racist and patriarchal structures of modern life, but instead simply seek a place on the same political and economic stage as their white male masters. The "extremists" on the other hand, are simply those who recognize that an end to slavery cannot be achieved by adopting the language and worldview of the slave masters, as Freire explained well (1972).

The more radical environmentalists, who have no respect for the modern institutionalization of racism and other forms of social and ecological violence, are pushed to the periphery of the political arena, because their arguments threaten the philosophical and social discourses that legitimate the socially and ecologically violent institutions themselves. Those who have interesting and important things to explain, and who are interested in being heard above all the hysteria, will need to sup-

port a political structure of debate that allows all views to be shared. Without such a sharing of ideas all who enter the "dialogue" will depart having learned nothing new, will be back where they started, and the old battle lines will remain. Any discussion is capable of informing people, and the customary-use debate is no exception, but such cross-fertilization of ideas cannot happen until people begin to trust each other sufficiently to listen to what they have to say and be prepared to learn something. Differences that are revealed become the starting point for reconciliation, through a process of learning that is part of the political process. Such reconciliation does not necessarily mean unity and sameness, but more importantly could mean the acceptance (and tolerance) of differences and subsequent coexistence.

Conclusion

The coexistence of differences is an underlying motif in the search for sustainability, which includes the coexistence of different cultures and the coexistence of different species. For human groups to be capable of sharing the landscape with others in an enduring fashion, they must learn or relearn ways to let beings be, as Heidegger invited them to do earlier in the twentieth century (eg, Heidegger 1962; Thiele 1995). The same can be said for the coexistence of different cultures. Letting members of a culture discover and be themselves is what it takes for social and environmental harmony to grow. Both Māori and Pākehā need to achieve this kind of self-discovery if they have any interest in surviving very far into the next century.

Such reflexivity is made possible by means of a framework for eco-political discourse that is inclusive and dialogical, so that different people can share their respective paths to self-understanding. Pākehā need to learn from Māori, and Māori need to learn from each other. For example, one Māori employee of the Department of Conservation has commented on the customary-use issue, saying that there is an argument "that some Māori have their own traditional code of conduct within their *iwi* to control a sustainable take of *kererū*. But just down the road their cousins are selling the birds commercially. I have to be honest and realistic, we have a real problem when dealing with our own kind in this situation" (King 1994, 31). Although this is true, it is not the end of the story, but instead represents the potential beginnings of a reconciliation within Māoridom.

Part of the process of resolving conservation problems within Māori communities involves the nurturing of those communities, which is made possible when Māori are able to build on their cultural strengths by employing cultural capital in the form of a language, a set of meanings, and access to a variety of resources. Māori participation in responsibility to protect resources *(kaitiakitanga)* would enable Māori guardians of treasures such as the *kererū* to exercise their cultural responsibilities over those Māori who breach harvest restrictions (see Wright, Nugent, and Parata 1995; King 1994). Sanctions can be invoked in a way that enhances Māori cultural integrity in an ongoing, evolving cycle of cultural revival as part of a project of cross-cultural partnership as offered in the Treaty of Waitangi. Such partnership can and should extend into the arena of conservation.

Even if Māori systems of resource management are set in place for the cooperative guardianship of indigenous species in New Zealand, problems that lie outside the sphere of Māori lore and its influence will continue. People (Māori and non-Māori) will continue to break Pākehā law and Māori lore in relation to the harvesting of indigenous wildlife. But this does not mean that Māori lore is illegitimate, any more than it means Pākehā law is illegitimate. The practice of guardianship by Māori and wildlife protection by Pākehā must involve disciplining those who break any harvest restrictions, whether such restrictions are set by Māori communities, by the Wildlife Act, or both. This issue must be negotiated between Māori and Pākehā in terms of a partnership in conservation practice. The possibilities for fine-tuning the details of such cooperative management or guardianship are endless, but what is important is for Pākehā to take steps toward such partnership. The Māori people took such a step at the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi and have continued to seek it ever since.

Whoever is interested in sustainability in New Zealand will need to demonstrate a capacity for mutual coexistence. Those Pākehā who are interested in any form of cultural partnership with Māori will have to learn to accept the legitimacy of the Māori world. This does not mean that Pākehā will become Māori, any more than Māori become Pākehā. The language of partnership does not have to be one language; even though the *kererū*'s song is different from that of the *tūī,* they both live in harmony, together in the same forest.

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Abstract

The debate concerning the customary use of indigenous wildlife has recently brought conservation into the arena of race relations and cross-cultural negotiation in New Zealand. Māori people are reclaiming rights to harvest traditional food sources as part of a current project of cultural revival. Indigenous bird species, which form part of this traditional diet, are legally protected, and as such, a conflict has arisen between Māori communities and (predominantly European)

environmentalists. Effective conservation of indigenous bird populations requires a commitment by both Māori and Pākehā alike to ensure the survival and flourishing of such birds and their habitats. Cooperation in conservation management is unlikely to occur if Māori people are continually denied access to engage in traditional practices. Customary forms of conservation, within the cultural framework of healthy Māori communities, can conceivably operate in association with modern conservation management. However, this will only become possible if Māori people are able to engage in and control the use of their own traditional resources, thereby enhancing such communities and necessitating the conservation of cultural treasures.

KEYWORDS: Customary use, conservation, indigenous peoples, Māori, New Zealand